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ECONOMIC GROWTH

(Economic Reform, Private Sector Development, Trade and Agriculture)

RORO corridor traffic in Basilan still on upswing

By Bob on May 16, 2008 in Feature, Travel

(Source: Mindanao.com-5/16/08)

LAMITAN, BASILAN—For the second year in a row, there has been a marked increase in vehicular traffic entering this island-province via “roll-on, roll-off” (RORO) transport.

In 2007, the number of vehicles passing through the two Basilan ports with RORO access—Isabela and Lamitan—totaled 11,288, a 41-percent rise over the previous year, based on data from the Philippine Ports Authority. The average number of vehicles per ship has likewise increased, from 8 in 2006 to 11 in 2007.

This is despite the fact that only one shipping line, Aleson Shipping, is providing RORO ferry services to the two ports.

The World Bank Development Indicators Report for 2003 suggests a high correlation between increasing road traffic and accelerated economic development. In poverty-stricken Basilan, where agriculture is the main livelihood, RORO is an increasingly vital conduit for selling produce and accessing vital goods and services.

The increase in RORO traffic was heaviest (56 percent) in Lamitan. More than half of the vehicles passing through the city’s port were cargo trucks. In Isabela, such vehicles made up only 20 percent of traffic, indicating a shift to Lamitan as the province’s preferred port for cargo transport via RORO.

RORO transport speeds up the delivery of cargo carried on land vehicles which simply roll off or onto ferry vessels along special ramps. Cargo loss or damage is minimized, and handling charges are reduced due to the shorter time spent in loading and unloading.

After the Lamitan RORO facility was completed in May 2005 through a partnership between USAID's Growth with Equity in Mindanao (GEM) Program and the provincial government, the Regional Ports Authority of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM), and the Philippine Ports Authority, RORO traffic in Basilan more than tripled, from 200 vehicles in January 2006 to 900 in December.

RORO projects in other key ports in the Sulu archipelago have also been designed and constructed by the GEM Program in collaboration with these agencies and local governments: Siocon, Zamboanga del Norte; Siasi, Sulu; and Bongao, Tawi-Tawi.

These RORO ports serve as the southernmost link of the Strong Republic Nautical Highway (SRNH), a 900-kilometer stretch of roads and ports connecting the country's three regions.

In her speech at the SRNH conference held in Cagayan de Oro last month, President Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo thanked the U.S. government for building the RORO connection in the Sulu archipelago. That portion, said the president in a side comment, should be called the "USAID-GEM RORO Corridor" of the SNRH.

"Indeed, the U.S. has worked side by side with our military and local officials on a large number of community public works projects," said President Macapagal Arroyo, adding that this outreach "has built more than buildings—it has built trust, which is the basis for effective and lasting democracy."

The GEM Program, which is implemented under the oversight of the Mindanao Economic Development Council, seeks to help bring about and consolidate peace in Mindanao, and to accelerate economic growth, while ensuring that as many people as possible benefit from that growth. GEM